DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 657 PS 017 317

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TITLE Early Childhood Curriculum and the Definition of Knowledge.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; *Early Childhood Education; *Educational Change; *Educational History; *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS Eighteenth Century; Nineteenth Century; Twentieth Century

ABSTRACT

This paper delineates conceptions of early childhood programs from the 18th through the 20th centuries, and reveals how the programs changed as the concept of what constitutes knowledge changed. Discussion begins with reading instruction and hornbooks in Colonial America, and national language learning in the knitting school of Jean Frederick Oberlin. Subsequent discussion focuses on empiricist approaches, including Owen's Infant School and Institute for the Development of Character, Froebel's kindergarten, and the role of American transcendentalism. Empirical models of early education related to the education of handicapped and disadvantaged persons are described; these include the pioneer efforts of Jacob-Rodrigues Pereire, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, Edouard Seguin, and Maria Montessori. The concluding section indicates how the emergence of the field of child study, progressive education, and theories of development influenced kindergarten programs. While knowledge of child development research and theory can be used to determine the appropriateness of a particular educational method for a particular group of children, such knowledge cannot be used to determine what should be taught to those children. (RH)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM AND THE DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE [1]

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The conception of what constitutes an educated person has long determines the content of education programs for children and youth. These conceptions are culturally defined, traditionally, in terms of how a society defines truth, goodness, and beauty. As conceptions of truth, beauty and righteousness have changed, so the content of education has changed as well.

For most of human civilization, the transmission of these conceptions of truth, righteousness and beauty was limited to an elite sector of the population: the nobility and the priesthood. With the coming of the industrial revolution, this group to be educated was expanded to include persons of wealth. Only in the last one hundred years or so has there been a move towards universal education. This pattern is evident in the history of western education. A similar pattern can be seen in the developments towards modernity in such Asian countries as Japan and China.

In recent times a number of educational theorists, sometimes using neo-Marxist class analysis, have argued that, rather than offer a common universal education to all persons in our society, different forms of education have been provided for the working class as compared to the children of the elite. The children of the elite receive an more classical education while those of the working class receive a more technical education, thus perpetuating the differences the class structure in society (Kleibard, 1985). Some recent critics, however, have argued that even the education of the elite (those enrolled in colleges and university, for example) is primarily technical -- a form of vocational education, though different from that given to working class students. Thus, these recent critics suggest that the differences in education is in levels of vocational training offered and the classical definitions of the educated man are being ignored (Bloom, 1987).

Seldom are such arguments raised in early childhood education. Since the beginning of this century, this field has

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[1] Paper presented at the 1988 Conference of the American Educaitonal Reseawch Association, New Orleans, April, 1988.

PS 017517

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allied itself closely with the field of child development and has distanced itself from the rest of the educational enterprise. The conventional wisdom of the field suggests, implicitly or explicitly, that the field of early childhood education is simply the practical application of the discipline of child development (Caldwell, 1984).

This paper argues that the content of early childhood programs has been embedded in conceptions of truth, beauty and righteousness that are held by a particular society at a specific time as well as by the social demands of the community. As conceptions of knowledge and social demands have changed, so has the content of early childhood education. While knowledge of child development research and theory can be used to determine what it is appropriate to teach a particular content to a particular group of children, it cannot be used to determine what it is that should be taught.

Conceptions of 18th Century Early Childhood Programs

There was seldom a distinction made between programs for young children and programs for older children prior to the 19th century. Indeed, in the first part of the nineteenth century, primary schools had no particular entrance age. In 1826, 5% of all children below the age of four, including 20% of all 3-year-olds, were enrolled in the primary schools of Massachusetts was below the age of five (May and Vinovskis, 1977).

In America as far back as the colonial period, young children were expected to learn to read as early as age 3 or 4, with instruction given at home by father to their children until the establishment of primary schools, required by the Puritan School Law of 1647 in Massachusetts. These early schools taught only reading. Since the Bible was considered the source of all knowledge, as well as of morality, reading was all that was needed for an individual to be considered educated.

The basic text was often a horn book, a paddle shaped board covered by a thin transparent layer of an animal's horn. Printed on these books was the alphabet, some short prayers, and excepts from the scriptures. This was considered the complete content of primary education. Once the children learned simple reading skills, they could read the Bible themselves. If one wanted to learn writing or arithmetic, one had to attend a separate school that would teach these more practical subjects that could be used in everyday life. This extended content became more important as the commercial life of the colonies expanded.

This religiously oriented early education in Colonial America was not too much different from the education which was offered to young children in Europe. Reports of early schools there include church day nurseries and the "knitting school" of Jean Frederick Oberlin. In this latter school, children were

taught handicrafts as well as provided with exercises and play. The transmission of knowledge consisted mainly of showing pictures about natural and social history as well as about the scriptures as children learned the names of things, first in their local dialect and then in French (Deasey, 1978).

This program reflected the shift in the curriculum from learning about religion to learning contemporary language skills. This shift mirrored the creation in Europe of nations through the integration of separate states. A single common language became important to maintain the integrity of the new nations. It was a similar motivation that led to publishing a common textbook, Noah Webster's Blue-back Speller, that was widely adopted in the primary schools of the newly established United States of America.

Nineteenth Century Early Childhood Programs and the Age of Reason

With the coming of the nineteenth century there was a greater distinction made between young children, older children, and adults. A concern for child labor becomes evident, resulting both from drawing the distinction between children and adults, and from the change in working arrangements as the move is made from handicraft cottage industry model, to an industrial factory model. Society was changing, and with the changes came concerns for social reforms to deal with the problems that were being created by industrialization and urbanization.

This period is also characterized by a shift away from religion as the basis of knowledge and education. The era, labeled "the age of reason," evolved with logic and experience overshadowing faith and religious knowledge as the source of truth. Fields of science were being created and scientific knowledge was being discovered in the field as well as in the laboratory.

With these developments, empiricism, with its dependence on personal experience and observation as a source of knowledge, and rationalism, with its dependence on reason and intellect as a source of knowledge, became legitimized. Schools for children and youth began to modify their programs, limiting lectures and recitations and providing experiences with physical and social phenomena as well as exercises in reasoning as a way of creating the educated person.

Owen's Infant School. One of the first distinct educational programs for young children was designed by Robert Owen, who also changed the minimum age for workers in his factory from six to ten year of age (Harrison, 1968). Through his efforts to provide social reforms for his workers, Owen concluded that early education can prepare individuals to live in the ideal society. A rational education would lead people to want a more rational

life, while developing the proper character needed to exist in the ideal community.

The focus on rationality and the use of experience rather than lecture and recitation as the basis of education characterized Owen's Institute for the Development of Character. The lower section of the Institute designed for the younger children, was called the Infant School.

Owen assumed that man's fundamental motivation is the pursuit of happiness and that society should be concerned with promoting the maximum happiness for the greatest number of individuals. Knowledge was viewed as being derived from objects surrounding the individual while truth is determined reasonably from what is consistent with nature. Children could learn to distinguish right from wrong by becoming aware of the natural consequences of acts rather than by using rewards and punishments, a modern sounding idea. Owen also assumed that the individual's character is the result of the education received and the conditions under which one lived. Education and living conditions have especially serious consequences in the early years of life since the child has little to unlearn (Owen, 1857).

Owen's infant school,his ideal school, had a short history in the United States, much like New Harmony, his ideal community. Infant schools that were established in New England and the middle Atlantic states were in competition with the public common schools of that period and the institution to educate young children outside the home was opposed by the family educators at the time who characterized the best education for young children as taking place in the home, at the hearth, on the knee of the child's mother (Strickland, 1982).

Froebel's kindergarten. The 19th century approach to early childhood education that has had the longest history and the greatest impact on the field is that of the kindergarten of Friedrich Froebel. Froebel was philosophically an idealist, holding much like Plato in ancient times, that ideas had a natural life of their own and could be validated in their own right without recourse to experience. Rather, experience will illuminate ideas rather than lead to their generation. Froebel's basic ideas were religious in nature; the ultimate idea was the unity of man, God, and nature. Each man, for example, reflects the whole of his culture, just as each tree reflects the totality of nature (Kilpatrick, 1916). Froebel elaborated this into a dialectic, with the unity of nature as the thesis, the diversity within nature as the antithesis, and the idea of each diverse thing representing the totality as his synthesis.

Froebel viewed development as the unfolding of the child. This unfolding could be nurtured by responsible adults - parents and teachers - who would nurture the child while following his or

her own nature so that each child may gain beauty in the fullness of his/her power (Froebel, 1896). Thus education followed development, guarding and protecting the children who learned as a result of self-activity. Knowledge of the basic ideas that Froebel wished children to achieve resulted from their contact with materials (gifts) and activities (occupations) that symbolized these ideas. Understanding sphericity or sensing the texture of a wooden ball, Froebel's first gift, was not considered important. Rather it was the fact that the ball, with its single external surface, symbolized unity. The meanings reflected in these symbols represented the knowledge that children were to achieve rather then the manipulative skills or the sensory experiences involved.

While Owen's Infant School approach to the education of young children faded from the scene, Froebelian kindergarten education, which arrive in the United States in 1856, flourished and was adopted by many institutions. There are several factors that contributed to its development as the prime way of educating young children. For one thing, unlike the infant school, the kindergarten did not separate the education of the children from life in the family. Froebel's conception of kindergarten education viewed the mother as central to the proper education of the young. This was in keeping with the movement towards "fireside education" noted above (Strickland, 1982).

In addition, Froebel's philosophy was seen as consistent with American transcendentalism. This American philosophic movement proposed to discover the nature of reality through the process of spiritual intuition. This was not unlike the philosophy of Kant and Fichte, upon whose work Froebel based his philosophy of education. These German philosophers sought to discover the nature of reality by investigating the process of thought rather than by studying the objects of sense reality.

Elizabeth Peabody herself was allied to the transcendentalist movement in Boston and was associated with many American transcendentalists, including Thoreau and Emerson. William Torry Harris, who as superintendent of schools in that city, introduced kindergarten education into the public schools of St. Louis, was a transcendentalist himself. After leaving the superintendency of that city to head the U.S. Office of Education, he continued to be an influential figure in the American kindergarten movement (Shapiro, 1983).

The content of Froebelian kindergarten education changed very little during the rest of the 19th century. However, the kindergarten itself was put to many different uses by a variety of sponsors. Churches incorporated kindergartens into their parish work as well as into their missionary work. American missionaries in Brazil, Rhodesia, Turkey, China, Japan and many other countries, established kindergartens as part of their work

at converting non-Christians. Kindergartens were established by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, by settlement houses, by labor unions and by businesses (Vandewalker, 1908). The diversity in sponsorship led to a diversity in ways of implementing early childhood education programs. Often practices in a particular kindergarten reflected the concerns of the particular programs' sponsors as much as they did Froebel's philosophy.

Other empirical models of early education. During the same period that the Infant school and kindergarten were developing, a form of early education was evolving in Europe that impacted on the education of handicapped children and was later to be adapted to the education of normal young children. The first pioneer of this approach was probably Jacob-Rodrigues Pereire, who also influenced Rousseau in his educational thinking that was to be articulated in the famous Emile. Pereire had fallen in love with a deaf-mute and had developed a method to teach her language (Boyd, 1914). Speech was taught by imitation using vision as a guide along with the deaf-mute individual touching the face and neck of a speaker to feel the vibrations of speech. One spoke to the deaf mute through touch as well, by putting one's lips against the ear, face or another sensitive part of the body so that impressions could be gained by the movement of air formed by speech. Signs were also used (Lane, 1976).

Pereire's approach to language education, along with the educational approaches Pinel and others, were adopted and elaborated by Itard in his effort to educate Victor, the wild boy of Aveyron. Victor had been found in the woods of Aveyron in France in 1800. He walked on all fours, had no language, and shunned most cooked food with the exception of baked potatoes. Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard took over the education of Victor. Building on the work of Periere, Itard devised an educational regimen designed to socialize Victor give his language skills and provide him with an understanding of the physical world.

Itard's program of instruction was a caring, nurturing one that was built upon the notion of empiricism. Knowledge of the physical world was seen as gained through experiences as perceived through the senses. Language could also be gained through sensory experiences. Itard's approach to education was to awaken Victor's senses of touch, taste and smell, and later to train the senses of hearing, vision. Attempts were made to teach communication through gesture. Victor was also taught the names of things. He also learned to categorize, though his categories seem too broad.

Through the program that was developed for him, Victor learned to match sketches to the objects they represented, and to distinguish shapes and colors. He learned to write and read and to understand simple grammatical structures, distinguishing

adjectives verbs and sentences. He also was provided with moral training, so that he learned to feel a sense of gratitude, of remorse, the desire to please, and of unjust punishment. While Victor did gain language, he never learned to speak. In the final analysis, Victor was considered, not a child of nature, but a child suffering from deficiencies, possibly retarded and/or autistic as well as mute (Lane, 1976)

While Itard's diagnosis might be judged to have been flawed and his educational methodology limited, his contribution to the field was significant. His method was adopted and extended by his student, Edouard Seguin who was able to extend Itard's concern for sensory education into a much more systematic approach to sensory pedagogy. This approach was to become the basis of educational programs for handicapped children in Europe and the United States for years to come.

Using Itard's sense-training as a basis for his theory, he developed a model of the mental act as impression, a consideration of impression, and expression. Each act contains both a motor function and a sensory function Seguin used the physiological exercise of senses and muscles to construct and reconstruct complete circles of acts and he used the exercise of one sense to corroborate the action and verify the acquisition of another sense (Talbot, 1964).

Among Sequin's teaching techniques was the use of music to develop controlled behavior and verbal expression, the use of physical and gymnastic training to develop intelligent behavior and the use of art media for the use of symbolic training. He developed a wide range of manipulative sensory materials for use by children, including form boards, lacing and buttoning frames, pegboards, texture boards, and other materials for sensory training such as word-matching sets and syllable cards and charts for teaching reading (Talbot, 1964).

Until this time, the focus on sensory training, that derived from an empirical view of understanding the world, was to be seen primarily in the area of education of handicapped children. Perhaps it was felt that normal children's senses were trained adequately during the process of maturation and the normal experiences of childhood. It was only when the normal maturation of the child was somehow disturbed that systematic training needed to be provided. Sensory education, however, was to find its way into the education of young children in a somewhat roundabout way within the framework of Montessori education.

Seguin's influence can be readily seen in the work of Maria Montessori. In working with mentally defective children in the Orthophrenic School in Italy at the turn of the century, Montessori sought for keys to unlock the potential of these handicapped children. In doing so, she explored the works of

earlier philosophers and educators, including Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Itard and Sequin. Drawing heavily on the work of Sequin, Montessori devised a system of education that was proved to be effective with these handicapped children (Kramer, 1976).

In leaving the Orthophrenic School, and creating her original Casa dei Bambini for working class children in Rome, Montessori evolved a system of education for young children that focused on sensory education. While Montessori viewed development as a process of unfolding, she felt that environmental influences also had a role in influencing development. Montessori developed her curriculum to influence sensorimotor, intellectual, language and moral development. Her curriculum included exercises in practical life, education in basic academic skills, language education, muscular education, and education of the senses. These elements were interrelated for even the learning of basic academic skills was imbedded in sensory education. Many of montessori's educational materials are similar to the manipulative material developed by Sequin. Indeed, by building on the work of Sequin Montessori was to evolve an approach to sensory education that was as much derivative as original (Spodek, 1973).

Montessori's education and her conception of development owes more to the study of physical anthropology of the time than to the developing field of child study, which was more psychological in nature. This influence is seen as much in her use of physical measurements as in her educational philosophy.

Early Childhood Education in the 20th Century

The coming of the twentieth century saw new approaches to early childhood education developing. Parallel to the development of the Montessori method a new early childhood education institution was created in England: the nursery school. While there was no new epistemological theory that was reflected in the nursery school, it did reflect a desire to provide children with social justice, just as the infant school had a century earlier. In addition, the nursery school was to be influenced by a new source of knowledge -- scientific knowledge about children that was being developed by the new field of child study or child development as it was later called. New psychological theories, including psychoanalysis (Owen, 1920).

Progressive education that was developing in the United States at that time was also to have an impact on kindergarten education, leading to a reconstruction of kindergarten theory and practice in the first quarter of the 20th century (Committee of Nineteen, 1913). The progressive kindergarten, following Dewey, saw the social life of the community as the source of children's education. Kindergarten educators also became more concerned

with the child's reconstruction of knowledge, building their method on Dewey's theory of instrumentalism or pragmatism.

As time went on, more and more attention was given to theories of development as the basis for early childhood programs, and less concern was shown for theories of knowledge. Along with this shift came the emphasis in early childhood education on providing children with knowledge of their inner selves rather than knowledge of the outer world surrounding them. Psychoanalytic theory had a great impact on the development of early childhood curriculum. Children were helped to explore and express their feelings rather than explore the neighborhood surrounding the school and express ideas about what they observed and understood. Art was used less as a form of representation and more as a form of expression of feelings. Play was seen as a media for emotional catharsis, allowing children to rid themselves of fears, anxiety and other negative feelings that might otherwise lead to adult neurosis. Teachers were admonished to observe and record children's behavior rather than intervene in their activities. The progressive view of early education as allowing children to reconstruct their experiences as a way of developing meanings, gave way to the view that early education best serves to provide an outlet for the expression of affect.

As developmental theories that concerned themselves with intellect rather than emotion were accepted in the early childhood educational establishment during the 1960's, new programs of early childhood education evolved that reflected alternative views. The Planned Variations curriculum models that were part of the Head Start and Follow Through programs reflect these orientations. Even with these alternative theories and program models, however, the goals of early childhood education focussed on internal processes rather than on helping children learn about the external world. Recently the National Association for the Education of Young Children's established guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice reflected what has become the conventional wisdom that early childhood programs are based upon developmental theory alone (Bredekamp 1986).

Yet developmental theory essentially provide information on the appropriateness of educational method, the <u>how</u> of what we teach not on educational content, substance of <u>what</u> we teach. Perhaps it is time to seek out the basis for choosing the content of early childhood educational programs. Building on an analysis of earlier pre-20th century early childhood educational models, we need to analyze the worth and validity of contemporary educational models.

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